



The Journey

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Indiana Disproportionality Committee

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<http://www.in.gov/cji/youth/idc.html>

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Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services

The Commission passed in the 115th Indiana General Assembly as a part of the Budget bill, Section 173. The commission is established "to develop and provide an implementation plan to evaluate and address disproportionate representation of youth of color in the use of youth services in juvenile justice, child welfare, education and mental health services". The 33 members will be appointed by the Governor, Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore of the Senate and an allocation of \$125,000 was made to support the work of the commission. This is a lot of work to be completed in one year. The legislation specifies that a report to the governor and the legislative council is to be made by August 15, 2008 and the report shall be made available to the public by December 1, 2008 when the commission expires.

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH SUPERINTENDENT RICHARD CURRY



What does 'disproportionality' mean to you? As I examine the word "disproportionality", I think of out of proportion or out of "whack". It is my sincere belief that our country is somewhat out of whack as it pertains to delivery of services and fairness for all races of people.

What have your personal experiences been with the issue? I have not experienced this issue first hand; however I have seen this issue numerous times throughout my 15 years of experience in the criminal justice arena and as an inner city pastor.

How does the issue impact your profession? This problem directly impacts my profession. In my role as the Superintendent of the Marion County Juvenile Detention Center, we deal with this issue up close and personal on a daily basis. This problem is magnified when I tour the various units in our center and larger portion of the kids we house are of minority ethnicity. For instance, it directly impacts how we house kids who come from the same neighborhood and are from the same gang, or in most cases rival gangs. These types of issues create safety and security nightmares for a detention administrator.

Why do you think disproportionality is happening? I sincerely feel that this issue is happening because "we" allow it to. I say "we" in the context of all stakeholders (parents, teachers, policemen, clergy, lawmakers, judges and even the victims themselves.) This problem is an accountability issue for all involved that has sort of been swept under the rug for far too long.

What can we do to solve this issue? Solving this problem is an on-going process. It is important to note that a lot of progress has been made thus far with the help of this committee and different agencies and stakeholders coming to the table acknowledging that the State of Indiana has a disproportionality problem; however we have so much ground to travel in order to complete this mission. Indiana is on the right track, however we must continue to force the issue and not rest until this ugly issue is dissolved!

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH JUDGE SCOTT



What does 'disproportionality' mean to you? In the work of the Indiana Civil Rights Commission, disproportionality includes the disproportionate representation of certain groups of students (e.g., students of color, students based on gender and students with disabilities) with regard to discipline (referrals, suspensions and expulsions) within school systems. The research shows that discipline for students of color and students with disabilities is imposed at higher rates and consequences are much more severe than for non-minority students.

What have your personal experiences been with the issue? Personally, as a former educator and parent, disproportionality in discipline existed in every school system at which I worked and in which my children were students. In Indiana in my current work, I am familiar with the extensive research performed by Dr. Russ Skiba regarding this issue. In recognizing its responsibilities and duties as to developing a comprehensive education program under the Indiana Civil Rights Law, the Commission has established its Education Steering Committee, which was charged with looking at equity issues in student discipline and possible solutions to the issue of the overrepresentation of minority students regarding adverse school disciplinary actions.

How does the issue impact your profession? The issue impacts the civil rights arena in that individuals whose rights are protected by our law are being denied an opportunity for equal and fair access to education when students are unlawfully disciplined—especially when such discipline may be a leading factor contributing to dropping out of school. As a result of this denial of statutory rights, complaints may be filed with the Indiana Civil Rights Commission and an investigation conducted. Once an investigation is completed, a determination is made as to whether probable cause exists to believe that discrimination occurred. During 2006, twenty-nine (29) complaints of education discrimination were filed with the ICRC. In one unique recent case, it was determined that probable cause exists to conclude the expulsion of one student was based on color or race, was discriminatory & unlawful, and that the disciplinary action was a major contributing factor that led to the student dropping out of school. Fortunately, that case was eventually settled by the parties, with the school district making payments to the family and the student, as well as agreeing to make an eventual award of a high school diploma for course work completed at another school.

Why do you think disproportionality is happening? I believe there are several reasons that disproportionality occurs. Current statistics show that approximately 85-87% of all teachers nationwide are white, middle-class females. There are few teachers of color teaching in our public and private schools today. Those who do teach, come out of teacher training programs unprepared to teach students from very diverse backgrounds. Teacher training programs may offer one or two classes on multicultural issues, but even if that is true, one or two classes are not sufficient for cultural responsiveness to become embedded in an individual's teaching style and methods—and in many instances those licensed to teach have not taken those limited classes. Moreover, history shows that teachers with the least amount of experience are often assigned to the schools with the highest number of minority students and with students that often have the most need. Professional Development requirements for teachers usually address academic standards and curriculum, and cultural competency or the ability to be responsive to the needs of culturally different students is rarely a component of these teacher-training workshops.

What can we do solve this issue? Because the issue is so complex, there is not a simple solution. The problem must be addressed from several different directions and by any and every individual or group with an interest in education. Groups and individuals must be willing to work together to collectively research the adverse impact and to recommend changes, statewide, that would favorably impact the highest number of students. The formation of the Disproportionality Commission is a major proactive initial step in this effort. In addition, we need to have proactive efforts brought to bear and the results analyzed to determine their value and impact. We must find a way to bring together all of the groups that are currently addressing this issue so that work is not duplicated and so that innovative ideas are shared among all the stakeholders. Also, I suggest the specific inclusion of the faith based community. That community should be solicited to participate in this enterprise. In many instances they will have insights of particular note and may be an important resource to provide family and student support in the course of academic years.

SAVE THE DATES

Research Sub-Committee Meeting: September 6th at 130pm at CBI

Training Sub-Committee Meeting: September 13th at 230pm at IMHC

Public Policy and Community Awareness Meeting: September 25th at 10am at Martin University

Fund/Development Sub-Committee: September 12th at 2pm at Indiana Civil Rights Commission

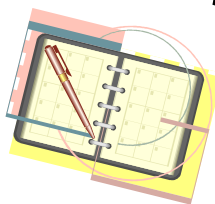
State of Our Black Youth—Indianapolis Committee: September 26th at 10am at Wishard Hospital T-2008B

Large Committee Meeting: October 10th at 1pm at IJTF

Education Steering Committee: TBA



More information regarding the meetings...contact Devina at djani@cji.in.gov



Related Readings and Articles

IARCCA...an Association of Children and Family Services, Special Report Brief: Racial Disproportionality and Disparity for Youth in Out-of-Home Care.

By: Jacqueline Remondet Wall, Ph.D and Steven M. Koch, Ph.D

<http://www.iarcca.org/referencelibrary/Sites/Site1/Homepage.asp?&Check=True&Check=True>

Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Indiana University, Unproven Links: Can Poverty Explain Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education?

By: Russell Skiba, Lori Poloni-Staudinger, Ada Simmons, L. Renae Feggins-Azziz, and Choong-Guen Chung

The Journal of Special Education Vol. 39/No.3/2005/pp. 130-144

The IDC is a coalition of public and private human service organizations, as well as individual community members, who are committed to understanding and eliminating the overrepresentation of minority youth. Our mission is to establish and create equality within the Indiana child welfare, juvenile justice, education and mental health systems and equalize the proportion of children of color in the child welfare, juvenile justice education and mental health systems with their percentage of the overall population.